



Press Release

Dragon and Phoenix – Centuries of Exchange between Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Louvre Abu Dhabi's second international exhibition of the year explores the cultural and artistic exchange between the two civilisations

To be held from 06 October 2021 to 12 February 2022 in partnership with Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet

More than 200 masterpieces from Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Musée Guimet, as well as 12 other museums and institutions

Focusing on the cultural and artistic exchange between the two civilisations from the 8th to the 18th centuries



Cup with dragon-shaped handle

China, Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), hammered gold with chased decoration, L. max 11.2 cm

Louvre Abu Dhabi

Photo credit: ©Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi. Photo: Ismail Noor / Seeing Things

Abu Dhabi, 9 September 2021: Louvre Abu Dhabi has announced its second international exhibition of 2021, *Dragon and Phoenix – Centuries of Exchange between Chinese and Islamic Worlds*, which will run from 6 October 2021 until 12 February 2022. Organised by Louvre Abu Dhabi in partnership with Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet with the support of France Muséums, the exhibition will showcase the cultural and artistic exchange between the Chinese and Islamic civilisations from the 8th to the 18th century. Visitors will be able to explore cultural connections through more than 200 artworks from the collections of Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Musée Guimet and 12 international museums and institutions, alongside a wide-ranging cultural programme.

Dragon and Phoenix places in dialogue artefacts from two worlds rich in culture, arts, and sciences: China (the dragon) and the Islamic world (the phoenix). The exhibition showcases the connections,

artistic influences and remarkable untold stories of more than 800 years of exchange through land and sea trade routes, from the establishment of the first Arab merchant colonies in Canton in the 8th century until the beginning of the 18th century. Journeying from the Mashriq and the Arabian Peninsula through Central Asia and the Indian Ocean, and to China and Vietnam, the exhibition reveals a long and rich history of mutual admiration and influence reflected in both material and immaterial exchanges.

Dragon and Phoenix particularly aims to highlight unconventional centres of artistic and cultural production. With both a physical exhibition at the museum and an online experience, it will shed light on how centuries of cultural exchange and the prolific artistic production between the two worlds reveal a dominance of coveted luxury materials and artworks between the 8th and 18th centuries.

The exhibition is curated by Sophie Makariou, President of Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet, with the support of Dr. Souraya Noujaim, Louvre Abu Dhabi's Scientific, Curatorial and Collections Management Director, and Guilhem André, Louvre Abu Dhabi's Chief Curator of Asian and Medieval arts.

H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi, said: "Louvre Abu Dhabi and its esteemed partner museums have developed a well-deserved reputation for mounting world-class, incisive exhibitions that bring to light previously unknown or underestimated cultural interactions and exchanges. Given Abu Dhabi's location as a historical and ongoing crossroads for trade, art and culture, it seems especially fitting that this exhibition is being held here at Louvre Abu Dhabi."

Manuel Rabaté, Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "*Dragon and Phoenix – Centuries of Exchange between Chinese and Islamic Worlds* continues our mission of narrating stories of cultural connections, exploring exchanges between the Chinese and the Islamic worlds through the prolific artistic production of these cultures. We are able to tell these important global stories through crucial collaborations with partner museums, and we are grateful to the exhibition's curator Sophie Makariou, the Musée Guimet, the Musée du Louvre and all our lending partners. Works from these collections, together with works in Louvre Abu Dhabi's own collection, bring this story of rich exchange to life."

Sophie Makariou, president of Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet, said: "This exhibition tells the story of two civilisations - the Islamic and ancient Chinese worlds. The long history of exchange between these two cultural centres began in the aftermath of the Quranic revelation, with the establishment of Damascus, and continued unabated after the formation of the Islamic caliphate. Until the 15th century, the trade routes, coined by Ferdinand von Richthofen as 'The Silk Road', were arduous but essential conduits of exchange between people, ideas, culture and products. *Dragon and Phoenix – Centuries of Exchange between Chinese and Islamic Worlds* tells the stories of these cultural exchanges which took place over eight centuries."

Dr. Souraya Noujaim, Scientific, Curatorial and Collections Management Director at Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "The exhibition reinforces the role of Louvre Abu Dhabi in highlighting transcultural relationships as well as the need to adopt novel approaches in the field of historical research. For nearly a thousand years – from the 8th century to the threshold of the 18th century – these two cultures were entwined through trade, scientific curiosity, and artistic production. Each observed and inspired the other. Our story of mutual influence and inspiration ends deliberately at the cusp of the 18th century, when alternative models with a radically new aesthetic appeared."

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Highlights from the exhibition include a rare Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) gold *Cup with dragon-shaped handle* from China, a masterpiece from Louvre Abu Dhabi's collection that may have been made for a nomadic dignitary in the north of China. Visitors will marvel at some of the most spectacular luxury silk fabrics ever created: the so-called *Panni Tartarici* (or Tartar cloths) – Mongol silk fabric with gold threads – from the collection of the Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet, which clearly attests to influences from other textile traditions, such as those of Iran, the Near East and Central Asia. Also from the collection of the Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet is a *Fabulous animal* (perhaps a dragon), showing the impressive chiselling technique on gilded silver, a rare creation from the Liao Dynasty (907/916-1125). *Dragon and Phoenix* also highlights the 'alliance of the two pens', the brush in China and the reed pen in the Islamic world. Thanks to a superb selection of drawings, manuscripts and ink paintings, the exhibition shows the similarities and the spiritual value placed on the two calligraphic traditions.

With more than 200 artefacts spread across five sections—the first four following a historical timeline, and the fifth focusing on literary traditions of calligraphy and poetry —*Dragon and Phoenix* showcases this history of a fluid global context of artistic and cultural exchanges in earlier times.

The exhibition features a diversity of artworks, including paintings, silverware, ceramic, glassware, manuscripts and luxury fabrics, with an international repertoire combining Arab epigraphy, chinoiseries, lotuses, geometrical decoration, dragons, phoenixes and many other fantastic bestiaries.

The five sections of the exhibition

The first section takes visitors on a journey between the 8th and 10th centuries, when regular contact between these two civilisations was established through terrestrial and maritime routes. It introduces the journey undertaken by travellers and merchants from the West, as well as these objects and techniques that were the result of these early exchanges. The artefacts in this section include representation of foreign merchants, such as a 7th century terracotta figurine of a *caravanner on a camel* from Northern China (Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet), as well as Islamic vessels imitating three coloured glazed ceramics (*sancal*) and Chinese silverware whose decorations clearly look westward.

The second section moves on to the *Song and Seljuq aesthetics* (11th – 13th centuries), describing the encounters between two emerging dynasties. The Buddhism aesthetics inspired the symbols of power in the eastern Islamic world – especially the representation of sovereigns. This can be seen, for example, in the late 12th century dish with throne scene or in the miniature from a 14th century *poetic manuscript with the image of an enthroned prince and his court* both from Musée du Louvre. The increased use of the maritime Silk Road during the Song Dynasty shows how Chinese products were exported en masse across the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea by *dhow*s – Arab merchant ships. Ceramics found on the shores of Eastern Africa, Madagascar, as well as South-East Asia and the Philippines attest to these commercial exchanges.

The third section is dedicated to the artistic interactions that took place under the Mongol dynasties (13th – 14th centuries) and their influences on the Islamic East. It was the period that saw the emergence of the famous blue-and-white porcelain from the imperial kilns of Jingdezhen in China. This section sheds lights on the use of the cobalt blue imported into China from Western Asia, and the aesthetical improvement brought to Chinese potters. During this period, China increased its production of luxury goods made specifically for export, to supply the demand from the Islamic world. A 14th-century Yuan dynasty *large serving plate* on loan from Cité de la céramique in Sèvres is the

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biggest blue-and-white plate of its kind, with a design that has been adapted to the traditions of Central Asian societies. Celadon wares and other ceramic products also demonstrate the vivid artistic exchange between the two civilisations. A *dish with ring of fish* from Iran (Musée du Louvre) is compared with a similar *Longquan celadon dish* from China (Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet). The two pieces clearly show shared decorative motifs including fantastic beasts, such as dragons, phoenixes and *qilin*, as well as vegetal patterns, such as grapes, peonies and vine scrolls, which attest to frequent transmission of symbols and shapes. Another example of exchange at this time is fabrics, with the Mongols facilitating the silk trade during the period of *Pax Mongolica* and setting the rules for Islamic and European fashion in the 14th century.

Aptly named the ‘*Gallery of Harmonious Exchanges*’, the fourth section analyses the mutually influenced artistic exchange taking place in the 15th- 17th centuries. From the 15th century, the Chinese imperial kiln of Jingdezhen started to imitate the shapes of Islamic metalware such as the *ewer decorated with zodiac signs* from Herat (Louvre Abu Dhabi). This can be seen in objects such as blue-and-white porcelains from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). These imitations highlighted the phenomenon of Chinese collections of Islamic inlaid metalware. The impact of Chinese ceramics in Vietnam as well as the artistic production of Islamic South-East Asia are also demonstrated in this section of the exhibition.

The exhibition concludes with a fifth section dedicated to manuscripts, poetry and calligraphy from the 8th to 18th centuries. The art of calligraphy is one the most highly regarded artistic mediums of these two incredibly literate civilisations. The prestige of calligraphy in the Islamic world is intimately related to the Qur’an and copies of the sacred text. Similarly, in China, the Three Perfections – calligraphy, poetry and painting – are the tools to physically express one’s spirituality, in harmony with the Dao. Among the treasures on view will be *Paintings and calligraphies* by Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), Dong Qichang (1555–1636) and Zha Shibiao (1615–1698) (Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet), which correspond to the exquisite letters of Arabic script found in a stunning selection of illuminated manuscripts from the Qur’an.

Dragon and Phoenix features artworks from Louvre Abu Dhabi’s collection, as well as loaned objects from Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet, Musée du Louvre, Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Archives nationales, Cité de la céramique – Sèvres et Limoges, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Musée de Cluny – musée national du Moyen Âge, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Musée Jacquemart-André – Institut de France, Musée national de la Renaissance – Château d’Ecouen, Muséum national d’Histoire Naturelle, and Musée des Tissus de Lyon.

The exhibition invites visitors to discover new historical perspectives and to observe how artworks and motifs showcases these stories of exchanges, interactions and migrations. Visitors will discover incredible interconnections between these great civilisations, with the exhibition unveiling production influences that otherwise would have been undiscerned. As with every international exhibition, Louvre Abu Dhabi asks visitors to see the interconnectedness of our world through art, questioning our own preconceptions and embracing global art histories, whose complexities enrich the understanding of our world.

The cultural programme for *Dragon and Phoenix* is a sensory journey across the narrative of the exhibition and will present a variety events and projects including a hand-picked selection of weekend film screenings and Dragon Boats as a new seasonal offering, in addition to the current yoga and kayaking activities at the museum.

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Further details of the programme will be announced soon.

For more information about the exhibition and to book tickets, please visit louvreabudhabi.ae or call Louvre Abu Dhabi at +971 600 56 55 66. Entrance to the exhibition is free with general museum admission tickets. Admission to the museum is free for children under the age of 18.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors:

Louvre Abu Dhabi is open Tuesday – Sunday from 10 am – 6:30 pm; closed on Mondays. Pre-purchased tickets are required to visit the museum. E-tickets can be reserved via the museum's [website](#).

Follow Louvre Abu Dhabi on social media: Facebook ([Louvre Abu Dhabi](#)), Twitter ([@LouvreAbuDhabi](#)) and Instagram ([@LouvreAbuDhabi](#)) #LouvreAbuDhabi.

For more information on Louvre Abu Dhabi's acquisitions policies and principles, visit [our website](#).

Louvre Abu Dhabi has been certified as a "Go-Safe" site. Our partnership with VPS Healthcare means that the health and wellbeing of our visitors will be prioritized throughout their visit, from timed ticketing to temperature checks, to the ample space to social distance throughout the galleries and outdoor spaces of the museum.

Ongoing offers and promotions:

Teachers are eligible for unlimited access to Louvre Abu Dhabi and its programming with the museum's *Teacher Pass*. The *Teacher Pass* is available at AED 120 for teachers, academics and other educators holding valid accreditation, based in the UAE or abroad.

People of determination and one companion, children and youth under 18 have free access to the museum.

Further information and terms and conditions on all offers and promotions can be found on the museum's website: www.louvreabudhabi.ae.

ABOUT LOUVRE ABU DHABI

Created by an exceptional agreement between the governments of Abu Dhabi and France, Louvre Abu Dhabi was designed by Jean Nouvel and opened on Saadiyat Island in November 2017. The museum is inspired by traditional Islamic architecture and its monumental dome creates a rain of light effect and a unique social space that brings people together.

Louvre Abu Dhabi celebrates the universal creativity of mankind and invites audiences to see humanity in a new light. Through its innovative curatorial approach, the museum focuses on building understanding across cultures: through stories of human creativity that transcend civilisations, geographies and times.

The museum's growing collection is unparalleled in the region and spans thousands of years of human history, including prehistoric tools, artefacts, religious texts, iconic paintings and contemporary artworks. The permanent collection is supplemented by rotating loans from 13 French partner institutions, regional and international museums.

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Louvre Abu Dhabi is a testing ground for new ideas in a globalised world and champions new generations of cultural leaders. Its international exhibitions, programming and Children's Museum are inclusive platforms that connect communities and offer enjoyment for all.

ABOUT GUIMET NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ASIAN ARTS

Inherited from the generosity and spirit of discovery of its founder Émile Guimet, and from the exceptional scientific contributions of researchers and archaeologists throughout the 20th Century (Louis Delaporte, Paul Pelliot, Maria and Joseph Hackin, Edouard Chavannes), the MNAAG offers a complete journey through the arts, civilisations and cultures of Asia.

The MNAAG expands on three sites: the main museum, place d'Iéna, the Hôtel d'Heidelberg, with the collections of Chinese furniture and the traditional Japanese tea house, and the Museum d'Ennery, an open window on Japonism at the end of the 19th Century.

Loyal to its missions of research and transmission of knowledge, the MNAAG offers a rich and wide program, with several exhibitions every year, including contemporary art and photography, an ambitious acquisition policy, events beyond its walls, and an artistic and cultural program open on all aspects of Asian culture and creation.

<http://www.guimet.fr/en>

ABOUT FRANCE MUSÉUMS

Following the intergovernmental agreement between France and the Emirates of Abu Dhabi signed in 2007, France Muséums, a cultural consulting and engineering agency, was created to work towards the creation of Louvre Abu Dhabi and support the project in all its dimensions (strategic, scientific, cultural, building, human resources).

Since the opening of the UAE museum in 2017, France Muséums continues to support Louvre Abu Dhabi in four main fields of activity: the management and coordination of loans from French museums for the permanent galleries of the museum, the organisation and production of 4 international exhibitions per year, training of teams and a wide range of consultancy and auditing assignments in all areas of museum management.

France Muséums mobilise its teams based in Paris and Abu Dhabi and a network of 17 major French cultural institutions and museum partners : Musée du Louvre, Centre Pompidou, Musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Réunion des Musées Nationaux et du Grand Palais (RMN-GP), Château de Versailles, Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet, Musée de Cluny – musée national du Moyen-Âge, École du Louvre, Musée Rodin, Domaine National de Chambord, Musée des Arts Décoratifs (MAD), Cité de la Céramique – Sèvres & Limoges, Musée d'Archéologie nationale – Saint-Germain en Laye, Château de Fontainebleau, and OPPIC (Opérateur du patrimoine et des projets immobiliers de la culture).

ABOUT MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

The Louvre in Paris opened in 1793, during the French Revolution, and from the very beginning was intended to provide inspiration for contemporary art. Courbet, Picasso, Dalí and so many others came to its hallowed halls to admire the old masters, copy them, immerse themselves in masterpieces and improve and fuel their own art. As an ancient royal residence, the Louvre is inextricably linked to eight

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centuries of French history. As a universal museum, its collections, among the best in the world, span many millennia and miles, from the Americas to Asia. Over 38,000 artworks are grouped into eight curatorial departments, including universally admired works such as the Mona Lisa, the Winged Victory of Samothrace and the Venus de Milo. With 9.6 million guests in 2019, the Louvre is the most visited museum in the world.

ABOUT SAADIYAT CULTURAL DISTRICT

Saadiyat Cultural District on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi, is devoted to culture and the arts. An ambitious cultural undertaking for the 21st century, it will be a nucleus for global culture, attracting local, regional and international guests with unique exhibitions, permanent collections, productions and performances. Its ground-breaking buildings will form a historical statement of the finest 21st century architecture; Zayed National Museum, Louvre Abu Dhabi and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. These museums will complement and collaborate with local and regional arts and cultural institutions including universities and research centres.

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND TOURISM – ABU DHABI

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) drives the sustainable growth of Abu Dhabi's culture and tourism sectors, fuels economic progress and helps achieve Abu Dhabi's wider global ambitions. By working in partnership with the organisations that define the Emirate's position as a leading international destination, DCT Abu Dhabi strives to unite the ecosystem around a shared vision of the Emirate's potential, coordinate effort and investment, deliver innovative solutions, and use the best tools, policies and systems to support the culture and tourism industries.

DCT Abu Dhabi's vision is defined by the Emirate's people, heritage and landscape. We work to enhance Abu Dhabi's status as a place of authenticity, innovation, and unparalleled experiences, represented by its living traditions of hospitality, pioneering initiatives and creative thought.

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